THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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KINGSTON TUREENS NOW ON DISPLAY AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

The Kingston Tureens, described by Cleveland Museum of Art director Sherman E. Lee as, "The most important works in silver made in Europe since the Renaissance," have been placed on display in the Museum. One of the Rococo style silver tureens with stands is owned by the Museum and the other is on extended loan from the Stichting Collectie Thyssen-Bornemisza.

The pair of tureens, designed by Juste-Aurele Meissonnier (1695-1750), the celebrated goldsmith and designer to Louis XV of France, were purchased at auction at Christie's in Geneva, Switzerland, last November by The Cleveland Museum of Art and the Stichting Collectie Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Commissioned from Meissonnier by the second Duke of Kingston and executed between 1735 and 1738 the tureens are major monuments of the Rococo style. "With their asymmetrical design, graceful curves, and imaginative treatment of natural motifs," explained Dr. Lee, "these tureens represent the purest expression of the 18th-century Rococo style, of which Meissonnier was one of the principal originators.

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Standing approximately 14½" high by 18" long by 15" wide, the tureens are, except for their covers, identical in design. The body of each tureen is shaped like a large shell, a principal motif of the Rococo style, and rests on cast bunches of celery, onions, and carrots. The tureen stands are asymmetrical in form with upcurved borders chased in the forms of waves, scrolls, and foliage. The cover of the Cleveland Museum tureen is surmounted by a model of a partridge, crayfish, mushroom, parsnip, and large foliage spray which forms the finial. Each piece--stand, tureen and cover--is signed by Meissonnier.

The Cleveland Museum tureen is illustrated on folio 72 of Meissonnier's Oeuvre, a series of engravings of the artist's designs published in Paris by Huquier between 1742 and 1751. The work has been published in a number of other periodicals and books, most recently Dorothea Nyberg, Meissonnier, An Eighteenth Century Maverick, Benjamin Blum, New York, 1969 and Frank Davis, French Silver 1450-1825, Praeger, New York, 1970.

After the Duke of Kingston's death, his widow removed most of his art collection, including the tureens, to an estate which she had purchased near St. Petersburg, Russia. When she died, the tureens were seized by her Russian creditors and sold in St. Petersburg. They next appear in the collection of Prince Bezborodko (1747-1799), Grand Chancellor of Russia. His heirs sold the tureens to Alexander Polovtzoff (1832-1909), Secretary of State under Tsar Alexander III. Polovtzoff's children in turn sold the tureens at auction in 1909 in Paris to the dealer J. Seligmann, who purchased them for J. Pierpont Morgan.

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